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U.S., Iran Sign Deal to Settle Some Claims

Tehran to Pay \$105 Million; Larger Disputes Still on Table

By Nora Boustany
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The United States and Iran signed an agreement over the weekend to settle 2,795 small U.S. claims as well as a few U.S. government claims against Tehran with a lump sum payment of \$105 million, State Department officials announced yesterday.

The agreement will allow U.S. and Iranian negotiators to concentrate on large financial disputes between the two nations.

A State Department specialist said that the agreement, signed Sunday in The Hague, resolved both a "large number" of claims by American nationals, each for \$250,000 or less, and "10 loans from the government of the United States to the government of Iran for various assistance purposes."

Among the major disputes yet to be settled by the Iran-U.S. Claims Tribunal in The Hague is Iran's claim of more than \$10 billion for undelivered U.S. military goods and services. Iran claims that the government of the late Shah Moham-

mad Reza Pahlavi paid that amount on contracts that were broken after the 1979 revolution.

"Some of their figures are quite fantastic. Obviously, our view and the Iranian view of what they have are very far apart," said one senior official.

The tribunal, set up in 1981 under an accord that freed 52 Americans held hostage at the U.S. Embassy compound in Tehran, is the sole forum for official contact between both countries since the rupture in U.S.-Iranian ties.

"The advantages to the U.S. are fairly clear. It resolves a very large portion of the claims tribunal's work load, which hopefully will make it possible to turn its attention to the remainder of its cases and finish its work much more quickly. Secondly, it assures that compensation will get to these claimants much faster," a senior State Department official said of the accord.

Those claimants include U.S. companies that had property seized or were not paid for goods and services delivered to Iran as well as

individuals who were forced to exit under emergency circumstances, without being compensated for property or back salary and wages.

The United States also has tentatively agreed to pay Tehran \$400,000 to settle 108 small claims from Iranians. Included is a claim for personal property left behind by Iranian naval cadets who had to suspend training in the United States after the hostages were seized.

The U.S. administration and chief Iranian negotiator Ali Nobari insist there is no connection between the recent releases of two U.S. hostages in Beirut and the small claims negotiations. Iran experts said, however, that any settlement could only help Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani or others pushing for further hostage releases as an indication that a more flexible policy toward Washington has its rewards.

On Sunday, the commander of the South Lebanon Army militia, Gen. Antoine Lahd, said he was ready to swap some Shiite Lebanese detainees for 16 western hostages and three Israeli servicemen.

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